



United States Mission to the OSCE

**Statement on the Police Crackdown
Against Protestors in Nizhniy Novgorod**

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 29, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On March 24 in Nizhniy Novgorod, as the Russian Federation has already mentioned, the third largest city in the Russian Federation, police forcibly broke up a demonstration by several hundred pro-democracy protestors. More than a hundred political opposition activists were detained and a number reportedly beaten. Most of those detained were released within a matter of days, as was already mentioned.

In addition, there were preventative detentions reportedly used to keep hundreds of activists from reaching the rally in the first place. Leading up to the rally, local law enforcement and city authorities also reportedly confiscated the literature of opposition groups, and spread misleading information about the nature of the march.

I take very much in mind the Russian Federation's statement, but we it is our belief the reaction by the local Russian authorities to the so-called "March of the Dissenters" rally in Nizhniy Novgorod, which included fielding a force of several thousand policemen, raises serious concerns about the Russian people's ability to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Saturday's event is the third such incident in four months of such heavy-handedness and overreaction by Russian authorities to a peaceful gathering of Russian citizens, following similar incidents in St. Petersburg and Moscow.

Our concerns are only intensified by the difficulties that opposition parties face in trying to register to participate in elections. We would therefore call upon all Russian authorities to respect fully international standards regarding freedom of expression and assembly.

And also we look forward to the Russian Federation's commitment to this organization, and in that regard to invitations to international election observers, including the OSCE's, to monitor upcoming Duma elections, consistent with OSCE commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.